

Research into Therapies for Preeclampsia, Inflammatory Bowel Disease, and Hearing Loss Win Funding from Stem Cell Agency

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Los Angeles, CA – More than \$36 million was awarded to research stem cell therapies for diseases that affect millions of Americans at the latest board meeting of the state's stem cell agency, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM).

The funding is for the New Faculty Physician Scientist Translational Research Awards – an initiative that is designed to encourage and support the career development of promising physician scientists, a group with one foot in the lab and one foot in the clinic that are believed to be best at advancing therapies to clinical use.

"To do the best science you need to have the best and most effective clinical scientists," says Alan Trounson, PhD, President of the agency. "This award helps physician scientists in the critical early stages of their career, providing them salary and research support for up to five years. Without that support many might not be able to establish an effective research career in science. With this support we are hoping to create a whole new group of world class researchers in California."

Those winning awards include physician scientists who propose:

- Using genetically-engineered stem cells to treat peripheral nerve disease, a painful and often debilitating condition
- Developing cell-lines to help test the ability of drugs to reduce the incidence of preeclampsia, a serious complication affecting up to 8 percent of all pregnancies, endangering the life of both mother and unborn child
- Trying to enhance the regeneration of inner ear sensory hair cells. Loss of these cells is a leading cause of deafness in everyone from newborns to the elderly
- Using stem cells to repair damage to the intestines caused by irritable bowel disease, a painful condition that can cause intestinal failure and lead to cancer

"These new awards reflect the breadth of the vision that we have at California's stem cell agency," says Leeza Gibbons, a patient advocate member of the agency's governing board, the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC). "We are trying to both encourage new physician scientists and target diseases that affect millions of Americans and that currently have no cure."

The ICOC received a briefing from Harold Shapiro, PhD from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) committee on its recently completed report on CIRM, including ten recommendations on steps the agency could take to improve its performance. The board members thanked the IOM for its diligent work and detailed study.

"This was a great opportunity for us to talk to Dr. Shapiro and his team and to gain a deeper understanding of the report and the rationale behind the recommendations," says Jonathan Thomas, PhD, JD, Chair of the ICOC. "Over the next few weeks and months we will be holding extensive discussions to decide how best to proceed with the report and its recommendations."

The ICOC also voted to approve amendments to the agency's Conflict of Interest Code, requiring board members and staff to continue making the broadest level of financial disclosures on their annual statements of economic interests. The Board's action satisfies the Political Reform Act, which requires state agencies to review their codes biennially.

In addition the ICOC approved \$3 million in supplementary funding for ViaCyte, which is developing a therapy to treat type 1 diabetes. A Clinical Development Advisory Panel of outside experts recommended the supplementary funding after reviewing the ViaCyte project and praising it as one of the top programs they have seen with a strong potential to produce a therapy. The funds were needed to ensure the project stays on the path to clinical trials.

The board also discussed a new plan developed by CIRM management for "Industry Engagement and Commercialization." The plan outlines four strategic objectives and cites existing and planned initiatives that support each one. The objectives include: attracting follow-on financing for CIRM-funded projects; support the creation, growth and relocation of companies in California; engage pharmaceutical companies in order to tap into their expertise; and actively assume a leadership role in promoting business in the field.

New Faculty Physician Scientist Translational Research Awards

RN3-06530	Robert Baloh	Cedars-Sinai Medical Center	\$3,031,737.00
RN3-06378	Reza Ardehali	University of California, Los Angeles	\$2,930,388.00
RN3-06504	Jason Pomerantz	University of California, San Francisco	\$3,084,000.00
RN3-06396	Mana Parast	University of California, San Diego	\$3,013,252.00
RN3-06425	Tracy Grikscheit	Children's Hospital of Los Angeles	\$3,408,000.00
RN3-06532	Tippi MacKenzie	University of California, San Francisco	\$2,661,742.00
RN3-06479	Ann Capela Zovein	University of California, San Francisco	\$3,084,000.00
RN3-06529	Alan Cheng	Stanford University	\$3,091,595.00
RN3-06455	Ali Nsair	University of California, Los Angeles	\$3,004,315.00
RN3-06460	Emanuel Maverakis	University of California, Davis	\$2,964,000.00
RN3-06510	Michelle Monje	Stanford University	\$2,800,536.00
RN3-06525	Ophir Klein	University of California, San Francisco	\$3,084,000.00
Total			\$36,157,565.00

About CIRM: CIRM was established in November 2004 with the passage of Proposition 71, the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Act. The statewide ballot measure, which provided \$3 billion in funding for stem cell research at California universities and research institutions, was overwhelmingly approved by voters, and called for the establishment of an entity to make grants and provide loans for stem cell research, research facilities, and other vital research opportunities. A list of grants and loans awarded to date may be seen here: <http://www.cirm.ca.gov/for-researchers/researchfunding>.

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